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THE LIE ABOUT THE WAR

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A NOTE ON SOME CONTEMPORARY WAR BOOKS

BY

DOUGLAS JERROLD

Author of 'The Royal Naval Division', 'The War on Land, 1914–1918', 'The Truth About Quex', etc.

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FOREWORD

THESE, in alphabetical order, are the books referred to in this pamphlet:

A FAREWELL TO ARMS	Ernest Hemingway
ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT	E. M. Remarque
DEATH OF A HERO	Richard Aldington
GOOD-BYE TO ALL THAT	Robert Graves
LE FEU	Henri Barbusse
RED CAVALRY	Bebel
ROUGH JUSTICE	C. E. Montague
SQUAD	James B. Wharton
THE CASE OF SERGEANT GRISCHA	Anton Zweig
THE ENORMOUS ROOM	E. E. Cummings
THE PATH OF GLORY	George Blake
THE SECRET BATTLE	A. P. Herbert
THE SPANISH FARM TRILOGY	R. H. Mottram
THE STORM OF STEEL	Ernst Junger
THESE MEN THY FRIENDS	Edward Thompson
WAR BIRDS	Anon

This pamphlet must not be read in any sense as a criticism of these books individually. Their very great merits are, in many cases, not referred to. I am dealing only with certain fundamental assumptions about the war which, wholly or partially, are to be found in certain salient passages or incidents in these books. It is my belief, for reasons which I give, that the passages or incidents in question are significant, and usually very significant, to the purpose of the writer, but it is with their significance to the present generation of readers that I am concerned.

DOUGLAS JERROLD

London, January, 1930.

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THE LIE ABOUT THE WAR

'TO the historian,' says Mr. Desmond McCarthy, 'the year 1929-30 will chiefly be remembered as that in which men's emotions *first began to turn* against the idea of war' . . . 'One of the symptoms of this change of attitude,' he continues, 'is the sudden and unexpected revival of interest in the *actualities of war* all over Europe. Books which a year or so ago no publishers could hope to sell are now read eagerly by hundreds of thousands.'[1]

I take these words as my text because they state concisely the one fact and the two fallacies with which this pamphlet deals. The fact is that this year has seen an overwhelming demand for war literature of a new and distinctive type. The fallacies are that the public to-day is beginning for the first time to turn against the idea of war, and that these new books deal with the actualities of war.

I make these controversial statements in the form of direct and unqualified assertions for brevity's sake. One cannot generalise without qualification either about life or literature, and I am not in the position to prove on the one hand that there is no section of the public which has in this year of grace changed or strengthened its views on war, or on the other than none of the new war books deal with the actualities of war. One—Mr. Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War*, certainly does. So, but in one sense only, does Mr. Robert Graves in his *Good-bye to all That*. But I do not think that anyone will seriously challenge

[1] *Life and Letters*, November, 1929. The italics are my own.

Mr. Desmond McCarthy or myself for stating as a fact that there is a special kind of war book (described by reviewers as 'frank and absolutely fearless'), which has reached this year the climax of its popularity, and that, whether by coincidence or otherwise, the supply of these books has accelerated so rapidly that no one but a professional reviewer can hope to keep pace with it.

As for the two fallacies, they are so inextricably intertwined that I do not propose to deal with the first of them —that the public attitude to war has undergone a radical change for the better—separately at any length. That there are a lot of people going about to-day saying that they never knew until they read *All Quiet on the Western Front* what war was really like I can well believe. But as to the value of the moral indignation, the emotional force and the effective will of people who were unmoved by the deaths of nine million men in four years but waited till a novelist wrote a book about it before they sat up and took notice—well, that is a different thing. There is one obvious element of exaggeration in the statement. Of the tens of millions of people now living who saw service during the war most must have seen as much as Mr. Remarque, and very many saw a great deal more. These tens of millions, at any rate, and the hundreds of millions of their fathers, mothers, wives and children, do not need to be told, and if their own experiences or the experiences of their nearest relatives did not 'turn them' effectively against the 'idea of war', Mr. Remarque's book is unlikely to have done so. We are left with the fact that there is a great deal more talk among the public generally (and the public to-day includes many millions not old enough to have any personal recollections of the war) about the horrors and injustices of war than there was a few years ago. Are these the '*actualities*' of war? And is the popularity of these books a real sign that the new generation is turning *effectively and constructively* against the idea of war?

Here is the real point. If I believed for a moment that

these books, by painting a true picture of the *general significance* of the last war, were likely to help to assure a just and continuing peace, I should regard it as a piece of professional impertinence to criticise any lack of perspective, any inaccuracies, or any lack of historical sense. If an indifferent book alters the course of history for the better, he is a captious ass who attacks it on aesthetic or literary grounds. But the facts here are quite other. Of the books to which I am going to refer, none is indifferent and many are extremely fine. But it is my purpose to show that they present a picture of war which is fundamentally false even when it is superficially true, and which is statistically false even when it is incidentally true. If so, they are a danger to the cause of peace. All causes which derive their inspiration from lies ultimately fail; the cause of peace will be no exception.

Let us deal with a simple point first. There is no such thing as 'the truth about war'. The phrase is sometimes loosely used to-day for the truth about the war of 1914-18, and when this is so I do not wish to be pedantic and to quarrel with it. More often, however, it is used as though there were a clear dividing line between the psychology, morals, and mental and physical processes of war and of peace. Just as that unfortunately named, though no doubt admirable body, the Catholic Truth Society, lays itself open to the charge of believing that there is such a thing as 'Catholic Truth' in contradistinction to 'truth', so those who use this phrase about war are open to the charge that they believe that there is a truth about war which is different from the truth about peace. This is nonsense. The only new factor introduced into the lives of men and women when the country is at war is the fact that some proportion (in the war of 1914-18 a fairly high proportion) of the men of military age have to engage in a very dangerous trade. It is the oldest trade, save one, in history, and at no time save from 1914 to 1918 have so many men been engaged in it as during the last ten years

when people in these islands have been blissfully satisfied that a new era of peace has dawned. I mention the fact not to discredit the conscientious and, on the whole, fairly successful efforts of statesmen, journalists and ministers of religion to re-establish peace in Europe—of the European powers only France, England, Ireland, Spain, Turkey, Greece, Russia and Poland, have been actively engaged in major military operations since 1918—but merely to show that these people who do talk seriously about the truth about war in contrast to the truth about the present, are talking nonsense. There are many different kinds of war and peace. The world is never all at war or all at peace. The only constant factor is human nature and the variable factor is not qualitative but quantitative.

Bearing this elementary, but not unimportant, fact in mind, let us get down to the truth about the war of the 1914-18.

The war of 1914-18 was a great tragedy because it was a great historical event. It was a great drama, because neither in its origins, its actions or its results was there any element fundamentally accidental or ultimately without meaning. It can only be right, or even useful, to deny the element of greatness to the struggle of 1914-18 if that element was absent. To deny the dignity of tragic drama to the war in the interests of propaganda is not only unworthy but damnably silly and incredibly dangerous. My case is that this is what we are doing to-day, and that it is time to make an end of it.

Burke said that you could not indict a whole nation. Where Burke feared to tread, I do not propose, even if I have the qualification, to rush in. I do not indict all authors, all publishers, all critics. I indict a class of book, a kind of critical attitude and a kind of publicity which is sufficiently notorious to-day and sufficiently well-reasoned to be described and accepted as a fact by the very brilliant editor and critic whose words I have quoted at the beginning of this essay.

I do not pretend to have read all these much praised books. I have read only those which I list in my Foreword. I selected them, with the exception of the books by Barbusse, Mottram, Herbert and Montague which I had read previously, by going to a London bookseller and taking a copy of every war book he had on his shelves at that particular moment. For my purpose there could be no better method of selection. I wanted to know, as an author, a publisher, and a student of war, what this new boom was, and what, if any, characteristics were common to these immensely popular books, and more particularly, what was this 'truth about the war' which the public found so much to their taste. Still more was I anxious to learn how this truth of to-day differed from that other truth which so many of us, from great generals like Sir Ian Hamilton, great poets like Mr. John Masefield and great humanitarians like Mr. Henry Nevinson, down to humble people like myself, had tried to tell a few years ago.

I came to the task of reading these books without any prejudices but with a considerable curiosity. For it struck me as, to say the least of it, extremely odd that in all this talk about fine thinking and fine writing, about 'actualities' and 'fearless' truth telling, about fundamental verities and what-not, no reference was ever made to those scores and scores of earlier books of history, reminiscence and adventure which for the first eight years of the peace followed each other in such an unending stream. These books were written close to the event by men who had seen at first hand, not a few of them by men of letters, more, perhaps, by professional soldiers and historians, and only a minority by amateurs like myself. It seemed to me, as I say, an extraordinary thing, that among the scores of 'finest books' and 'ultimate truths' none of the earlier volumes found a place in critical estimates. When my reading was finished I found it less extraordinary, but infinitely lamentable. For I found

that what was now being written about 'the war' was written from a standpoint which to me at any rate was wholly novel and almost wholly displeasing. I found, it is true, courage and long-suffering nobly depicted, but with the exception of what is told in Mr. Robert Graves's book, it was not the courage and long suffering of soldiers but of civilians, and of individual, isolated civilians at that. Since no number of individuals, however high their spirit, can win a war, or even endure its hardships for a month of comparative quiet, it was obvious at once that whatever message these books had to give did not concern that war which was nobly won or nobly lost on so many battlefields. How could I avoid, even at the outset, approaching the conclusion that it was a peculiar, unhistoric, and absurdly romantic vision of war which was popular, and that under the clever pretence of telling the truth about war, a farrago of highly sentimentalised and romantic story-telling was being foisted on to a new, simple and too eagerly humanitarian public.

When I came to look closer I was struck by another common feature of these books, equally extraordinary. Side by side with the brave and the long suffering were depicted the shirker, the *embusqué*, the arrogant, the callous, the brute, the fool and the coward, all thrown together in more or less equal proportions in groups apparently intended to be representative. Was this too an element in the popularity of these books? Was this perhaps the feature which made them so attractive to the men who stayed at home, and those others who, never tested in the furnace, yet felt themselves—*ἡμεῖς γὰρ πατερῶν μέγ' ἀμείνονες εὐχόμεθ' εἶναι*—so plainly superior to the war generation.

Be that as it may, one thing was crystal clear. These books could be read and accepted only by men who had wholly forgotten or wholly rejected the earlier books. And that is what is lamentable. For if these books be

indeed the standard by which we judge, almost all the great war books have passed into oblivion.

To take England alone, and one campaign alone, Nevinson's *Gallipoli Campaign*, Masefield's *Gallipoli*, and Ian Hamilton's *Gallipoli Diary* belong not to war literature but to literature. The most lion-hearted of all lovers of peace and liberty, the most robust of poets and the most chivalrous and poetic of soldiers have written their words, not in printer's ink to flaunt an ill-considered personal emotion before a sensation-loving public for gain, propaganda or special pleading, but in letters of blood, impelled to break silence by the mere majesty of the events in which their lot was cast. And as to other fronts, and taking history only for the moment, we have Lord Ernest Hamilton's *First Seven Divisions*, Sir Julian Corbett's first two volumes of the *Naval History*, and other books of their order, without qualification good, brave and true. And there are others. Even in the realm of the purely 'unit' records, we have Mr. Rudyard Kipling breaking into literature and Mr. Falls wandering into history. And yet critic after critic repeats, or, till the floodgates of self-deception and disillusion were opened, repeated, that we still waited for 'the truth about the war'.

Admittedly there were too many of the official and semi-official histories, and as far as the common run was concerned, their defects were considerable. They mostly lacked background and they were nearly all uncritical of the higher command and of the continuous and inevitable lack of veracity of the contemporary written records. Heavy casualties are too invariably due to 'circumstances which could not have been foreseen', defeats and disappointments almost always to unaccountably superior forces or natural obstacles of incalculable difficulty, seldom to errors in strategy or tactics, never to human weakness. The only reference to this last and most frequent cause of military disaster was found in the ridi-

culous refrain of too many of the professional soldiers about 'untrained troops'. And this from men who had suffered at the hands of the Boers every indignity down to surrender in the field which one army can inflict upon another.

Yet even this, surely a bull point for our literary pacifists, was missed. The defects of these histories were ignored along with their merits. When they were published the critics were dumb and the publishers uninterested. The public, I maintain, never got a chance. At least, not the public which fought. Without the strong support of those who control the literary press, without the formalities of preliminary paragraphs, day of publication reviews, signed articles aptly prepared for quotation, the expensive business of 'putting a book across' simply cannot be undertaken. Now the mood has changed, we are told. The public conscience is aroused, the 'actualities' of war are in demand and a new generation of more inspired writers has arisen to answer its passionate call. The truth at last, and recognised as such, by an age so enlightened as to be able to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Even before reading these books I should have been strongly inclined to say that I didn't believe a word of it, that I didn't believe that a public which left 400,000 ex-service men on the verge of destitution, which is content to see holders of the Victoria Cross starving in garrets, while it goes hysterical over the latest divorced film star, and has only to get a hint that a novel deals with sexual perversion to swarm on it like flies on dung, is so supremely gifted with artistic perception, with moral earnestness and with passionate sympathy. After reading these books I express my disbelief in the superior moral and aesthetic perceptions of the moment without qualification. On the contrary, the people who are reading these books are mainly those who have chosen to forget or who are unable to remember.

During the first few years after the war, when men who had been close to the events were writing of what they knew and of what they had suffered for *men who also knew and had also suffered*, that great mass of the reading public which is made up of the literary profession (always insatiable for each other's washing), the adolescent, and the middle-aged were recovering but slowly from the silly illusion of inferiority which the *réclame* enjoyed by the intermediate generation who had done the practical work of the war engendered in their extremely sensitive consciences. History after history, diary after diary, personal records of great commanders, of junior officers, of journalists, of civilians, not to mention half a hundred divisional and battalion histories, were published and hastily buried. Even the novelists fared no better. The most brilliant of our novel publishers rejected Mr. R. H. Mottram's *The Spanish Farm* without a second thought. It cannot have been rejected on any grounds except that it was 'about the war'. But Mr. Mottram was more fortunate than Mr. Herbert, whose *The Secret Battle*, still but for one defect the best of English war novels, remained secret despite the fact that it was published and even praised, and Mr. Patrick Miller, whose fine book *The Natural Man* was almost ignored. And there were other books as well. But the public weren't allowed to want them. Space, position and priority of reviews count more than mere praise, and these were denied. *The Secret Battle* is, in one way, the most curious case of them all. Published to-day by one of our enlightened publishers who has discovered that war, even when written about cleanly by a brave man, pays, it would have sold a hundred thousand copies. It was ignored simply because all war books of its period were ignored, not only or mainly by the public, but by the literary cliques who make the market in books, and by the very young, who so largely read them.

The result was pitiable, even disastrous. For with the

defects of the earlier books so much of the truth also has been forgotten. More of the truth lies buried in those scores upon scores of early histories and diaries than in such an effusion as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, or in the agonised sketches of Barbusse, in *Sergeant Grischa*, in Fritz von Unruh's terrifying pages, or even in Mottram's *Spanish Farm*. Not the whole truth, of course, for we want in one volume the dramatic power of a Remarque, the humility of a Blunden, the patient observation of a Mottram, the sensitiveness, the wide experience of life and the irony of a Nevinson, the historical genius of a Corbett, the detached candour of a Graves, the military romanticism of an Ian Hamilton, the military classicism of a John Fortescue, the *saeva indignatio* of a Zweig, and the historical mind of a Liddell Hart. To condemn a book for lacking some of these high qualities would be ridiculous, but not less ridiculous than to praise a book as a masterpiece because it lacked all but one of them. 'The truth about war'. The phrase has for those who know even a little about war a peculiarly savage irony. It is indeed with a Pecksniffian insistence upon our inability to forget that we are turning into cash our inability to remember.

Some of these greatly praised volumes are fine books. I do not want any words of mine to be read as trying to detract from objective merits which, as an infinitely less gifted writer, I ungrudgingly admire. There are pages in Barbusse, in Zweig, in Remarque, in Montague, which are without qualification great in their descriptive power, in their passionate sympathy, and in their power to convey the sense of horror, of desolation or fear which the author feels, imagines or recalls. But if a greater writer than any of them—Dostoievsky—were proclaimed by critics and publishers as the man whose books told the ultimate truth about Western, or even Russian civilisation, one would have to laugh or to hate, according to temperament, without regard to the writer's genius and

his subtle psychology. Seen from such an angle and judged by such a standard even such a masterpiece as *The Brothers Karamazoff* would be fundamentally and in the ultimate analysis, not the truth but a lie. That is the case with nine out of ten of these 'great' war novels.

Let us take some of the salient incidents of these books. Brave men shot for cowardice (*The Secret Battle*); innocent men condemned to death for offences never committed (*Sergeant Grischa*); routineers behind the lines worrying young heroes with an impertinent barrage of trumpery complaints (*The Spanish Farm*); strong men brutalised by the sheer horror of war (*All Quiet on the Western Front*); drunken staff officers glorying in Courts Martial (*Rough Justice*) and cynical ones letting them take their course (*Sergeant Grischa*, *The Secret Battle*, *Rough Justice*); the brutality of gaolers and the simple Christian humanity of suspects (*The Enormous Room*); the iniquity and uselessness of a war prolonged to victory (*Good-bye to all That*); the absurdity of patriotism (*A Farewell to Arms*); the callous indifference of governments and the misplaced faith of the private soldier in their good intentions (*Squad*, *The Enormous Room*, *All Quiet*); the death of a whole generation as typified by the annihilation of a whole section or squad (*War Birds*, *Squad*, *All Quiet*); the hopeless struggles of sane men against futile incompetence (*The Path of Glory*, *These Men Thy Friends*).

The first significant fact which emerges is this. Every one of these books, and with two exceptions they would be fine books if veracity has nothing to do with it, deals with every conceivable kind of struggle except the struggle of one army against another,[1] of one people against

[1] Mr. Graves's book provides a partial exception. He tells with great clarity and a fine measure of sympathy of the professional *regimental* officers' attitude to war, but throughout his book gives no hint of the existence, let alone of the predominant importance, of the conflict of *armies*.

another, of one creed or philosophy against another. This is not accidental. The writers of these books are too gifted and too clear. The reason is perfectly simple.

These books all reflect (intentionally or otherwise), the illusion that the war was avoidable and futile, and most of them reflect the illusion that it was recognised as futile by those who fought it. It is this obsession of futility, not any special depth of sympathy or humanitarianism which accounts for the piling up of the individual agony to so many poignant climaxes remote from the necessities or even from the normal incidental happenings of war. The suffering, the horror and the desolation is presented always and brutally as without a meaning so far as the declared purposes of the struggle are conceived, because these declared purposes are, to the writers and critics of the moment, either so many impudent and deadly frauds or so many irrelevancies, to the achievement of which the blunders and crimes of the military were only so many obstacles.

Now these writers are too gifted not to know that if the sufferings of the war were really futile and superfluous or its incidents irrelevant, the sufferings would in themselves be utterly without significance. These writers know as well as I do that the only possible tragedy of the war, *considered as war*, lay in its inevitability, that to deny the element of fatality must be to deny that it was a tragedy at all. Yet to accept the element of fatality would be to invest the war with a grandeur which these novelists are determined to deny it. Hence the frantic attempt to get the dramatic quality out of every kind of struggle except the struggle of one army against another and so to get a significant novel without having to admit that it was a significant war.

The struggle of the coward against fear, of the artist's sensibility and refinement against progressive brutalisation, of the brave man against exhaustion, of the 'line'

against the Staff, of the amateur against the professional soldier, of the individual against authority, all lead up to and are subservient to the ultimate and wholly mendacious struggle of the man of peace against war, 'the fighting, the terror, the mastery, the power and the tenacity of the vital forces of the individual man faced with death and annihilation'.[1] To put it another way, perhaps gaining in vividness at the expense of exact analysis, the real tragedy of the war is being falsely reported as the death of so many men whose duty it was to live, whereas the real tragedy was that duty offered no alternative but death. And it was for this reason that death was accepted, not in fear, not in sullen indifference or in open or suppressed revolt, but deliberately and in the face of countless opportunities of evasion.

This is where the crime against mere veracity begins to show. To establish the dramatic quality of the secondary and sometimes wholly imaginary struggles which make up the tale of these unmilitary epics, every essential fact is falsified, either objectively or by an illegitimate technique.

A French critic[2] has accumulated a catalogue of objective errors in some of the more popular works. I hesitate to follow in his footsteps because it is impossible to establish a negative. What is happening to-day is precisely what happened in 1914 in the matter of the German 'atrocities' in England and in 1919 of French 'atrocities' in Germany. A grotesque legend is being built up on a slender basis of hearsay—another and very striking proof that the psychology of war and of peace is fundamentally the same. Mr. Robert Graves finds suicides and executions 'frequent' but denies that rape was 'frequent' in the German army. 'Frequency' is a loose word, but no conceivable theory of language can justify it as applied to executions in the British Army, while the

[1] The words are Remarque's.

[2] *Témoins*. Jean Norton, Crue, Paris, 1929.

number of suicides was infinitestimal compared with those of the present day. To say that suicides were frequent in London and Berlin in 1929 would not convey in 1930 an incorrect impression because we should know that the writer only meant that the suicide rate was slightly above the normal year's average. But if the sentence were dug up by a historian a thousand years hence, living in a civilisation wholly different from ours, he would draw a ridiculous conclusion. And an equally ridiculous conclusion is being drawn, and cannot but be drawn, from Mr. Graves's remark about executions at the front by a generation which never went through the experience of war. The *Daily Herald* proceeded at once to prove my point by using the words as a headline and referring to Mr. Graves's sensational revelations of British Prussianism. Yet it may be noted that the only actual case to which Mr. Graves refers was one of unprovoked murder which would have been visited with the death penalty in peace without any possibility of doubt. From the statistics of 'military executions' all such cases must, of course, be deleted. So, too, must cases of Treason, which is not an offence against military discipline but against the common law.

Take again, the incidence of the death rate. It is, of course, true that many battalions were 'annihilated' many times over and that many wounded died of wounds. It is, however, very striking in these books, how every ration party, every fatigue party and every wiring party is the subject of murderous fire, and how a slightly wounded man is unknown. I wrote in a newspaper the other day that more than nine out of ten wounded men who reached the base hospitals recovered, and received a score or more letters deriding the statement as a lie. Yet the statement is true. In certain units of my own division (the only ones for which I have precise figures), the number of wounded was almost 31,000, and the men who died of wounds little more than 2,500. Even these figures

are misleading, since no casualty however gravely wounded may be reported as 'killed' if he leaves the line alive. The deaths at the casualty clearing stations and in the intermediate hospitals were very numerous, but of the fact as I stated it there is no doubt.

Again, the number of casualties in the normal routine of war was high, and in my opinion, which is shared today by many professional soldiers, avoidably high. But it was not anything like as high as is suggested by such a book as *All Quiet on the Western Front* where every ration party runs into an intensive bombardment and every shell finds its mark.

These facts have nothing to do with 'the truth about the war'. They do not make war less horrible or its tragedy lighter. And it may be argued that it is merely a legitimate use of poetic licence to crowd the horrors together as Remarque does at the beginning of his book even against the mere possibilities, when disembowelled horses appear in the trench system (indeed in front of it), and high explosive shells toss coffins about in a graveyard (apparently selected by the French as a suitable target for a bombardment probably costing £20,000).

But can the argument stand? As propaganda it is foolish and futile; indeed, I intend to show that it is actively dangerous to the cause of peace. And aesthetically, historically, morally if you like, it is wholly unsound. War has been defined years ago literally and accurately as being, for the fighting soldier, months of acute boredom interspersed by days of acute danger. Most of us managed to conquer the boredom, and some of us, by the mercy of God, to escape the danger. But there is the statistical fact, and to telescope the months into paragraphs—or even into three asterisks on a page—and to expand the days into books is to present a picture of war which bears no more relation to the reality of war than Remarque's picture of the ex-soldiers of all nations as men who are 'weary, broken, burnt-out . . .

superfluous even to ourselves . . . so alone and so without hope' does to the reality of peace. These things are not the truth but lies.

And here at least there seems to be no dispute. Indeed it is for that reason that I propose to pass from the subject. None of the letters—many of them abusive—which I received as a result of the newspaper article mentioned above, reflected the Remarque mentality in the slightest degree. Most of them suggested that I had never been near the front, and one or two took the unfortunately mistaken view that I had been paid vast sums by munition makers to start a new pro-war propaganda. But the genuine bitterness which the letters revealed had nothing to do with the previous experiences of the writers—the most bitter of them had had no personal experience at all—but with the feeling that they had been tricked into a useless, avoidable and unnecessary war. That the war was, in a technical sense, unnecessarily prolonged is now, I think, generally realised, but this was not the point taken. The general view seemed to be that the war was begun and carried on as long as it was out of mere callousness or for the personal gain of politicians, contractors and generals.

That it is the object of these books to foster this conception I do not assert, because I cannot prove it. What is certain is that all these books, and even the finest of them—Mr. Robert Graves's autobiography—suggest it to the reader. They do it by a technical device which ought to have been detected by the most undergraduate reviewer, but which in some unaccountable manner has escaped detection, even by our ablest critics. They do it by writing of the war always and continuously from the standpoint of the individual, without pointing out, or even allowing the reader to guess, that the individual in modern national warfare is not a fighting unit.

To the individual personally, all operations of war are meaningless and futile. He has no sense of personal contention with his enemies, not because they are not his

enemies, not because the issue of the struggle is immaterial, but simply because the smallest fighting unit is, in modern national warfare, not the individual, the section or the company, not even the battalion, the regiment or the brigade, but the division. And that on rare occasions only. The movements which made history, which broke in succession the power of the Czar, the Turkish Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the German military bureaucracy, were the movements, the hammer blows, of Armies and Army groups. In relation to these movements, the agonies, the ardours, and the endurances of individuals assume a tragic and heroic dignity. Divorced from them, related not to the will of their Commanders, the moral, physical and economic resources of their nationals and the aims of their statesmen, but to the limited horizon of the individual soldier, the wanderings and sufferings of the squad, the platoon, or the company, not only appear to be, but are, utterly futile and without meaning.

By the simple device of omitting from the book the relationship of the part to the whole, the writers of these books make *every* incident and *every* tragedy seem futile, purposeless and insignificant. This is the ultimate, dastardly lie. Why is it told?

Mr. Remarque has given the answer to us himself. And the answer is simply that Mr. Remarque 'likes to regard' the struggle of 'the vital forces of the individual man' as the universal fundamental experience. 'Likes to regard!' The confession deserves to rank with that of the Turkish pasha whom the Baroness Kleinmichel met in 1920 for the first time since 1914, of whom she records that 'the collapse of three empires had left him entirely uninterested, but when I told him that the Yacht Club at Petrograd had been closed, he burst into tears.'

That is one reason out of many why I said earlier that I was not convinced of the superior disinterestedness and the superior sensibility of these writers over those earlier

writers who had also seen, suffered from, and written of the war. A man who regards the fundamental drama of war as that of the individual struggle for survival might well ponder before he claims a moral superiority over those who found it in the rivalry of brave men to be in the front of the battle. These new writers, we are told, face 'fearlessly' the facts of war. There is more courage in the little finger of a Roger Casement and more nobility than in all the flesh and blood of men who can read history like this. As for their infinite pity, nothing is easier, unfortunately, than to be bravely sympathetic about the sufferings of the past. When I see men like Henry Nevinson, who have fought for unpopular and pacific causes for fifty years at the price of obloquy and personal loss, able to write of the deaths of Englishmen in the war as a 'free sacrifice, in a cause, involving great issues for mankind', how can I not be conscious of the difference between the gold and the brass of sympathy, between the sympathy which thinks only of others and the sympathy which is odiously concentrated on itself?

And even if we allow the sympathy, what of the logic? Mr. Remarque 'likes to regard' his individual struggling to escape from the slaughter. He does not, presumably, 'like to regard' Europe and the future of its hundreds of millions for generations to come. For all his devotion he would rather restore the armed camp of 1914 and forfeit the hope of enduring peace rather than run the risks of war again. I do not believe it. But he says it.

Why this damnably foolish cant about a futile war, a war which broke up the structure of Europe, hurled three empires into the dust, brought into the very forefront of history three great new states, liberated the German people from a military despotism, established a new system of international relationships and, by a curious inversion, carried Western conceptions to Eastern nations?[1]

[1] In this connection also General Smuts's words quoted on page 47 *seq.* are relevant and striking.

For good or ill the war altered the conditions of all peoples and of all individuals and changed the course of history. Neither the most extreme individualist nor the most earnest pacifist, nor their descendants, will be able to escape from or to modify its consequences.

I am not arguing in favour of any particular philosophy of international relationship. I am only pointing out the obvious fact that the war changed the course of history, and that if the war had begun and ended with a surrender to threats, if it had been won by the Central powers, or had been inconclusive, history would have been changed equally profoundly though in a vastly different way. The only argument ever put forward against this truism is the ridiculous one that it doesn't matter to the individual what his government is or what his religion is, whether he is bound or free, whether he is rich or poor, what language he speaks or what his children are taught. To an individual of this peculiar kind it must at least be equally a matter of indifference whether he is alive or dead. The argument that if the war had never taken place we should all have been happier is, of course, not an argument at all. All this literature is about a war which took place because no one could stop it. If it had been stopped it would have been because Europe in 1914 was quite different from the Europe which then actually existed.

The conclusion is that those English and American and German writers who pretend to so passionate a sympathy for suffering humanity and yet proclaim the war as so much futile bloodshed can choose between the assumption that they are wholly indifferent to the liberation of Poland, Bohemia and the Eastern States of Austria from an obsolete tyranny, to the establishment of the League of Nations, to the downfall of autocratic government in Germany and Russia, and the alternative assumption, that they simply have not thought about the matter at all, except from their own particular standpoint. That

this last astonishing and rather shocking conclusion is true of at least one of them—Erich Maria Remarque—we know from the revealing correspondence between this author and another far greater writer, General Sir Ian Hamilton.

'The very heart of my book,' says the German author, is 'the intention of presenting the fate of a generation of young men who, at the critical age when they were just beginning to feel the pulse of life, were set face to face with death. . . . I merely wanted to awaken understanding for a generation that more than all others has found it difficult to make its way back from four years of death, struggle and terror.'

This is a remarkable admission.

From what more arbitrary, more parochial and more fundamentally selfish angle than this is it possible to treat the history of an event which has changed for generations to come the daily life and the hopes of all the peoples of mankind. Of course the effect of the war on those called to face it as Remarque was, as the present writer was, at an early age is different, and, to men of a certain physique apparently more searing, than on men differently circumstanced. Of course it was harder to 'get back'. We had missed our education, our technical training, we came back with too little experience of life and too much experience of death. But even in the case of this particular 'age group' (pretty well the least important, incidentally), the facts in these books are faked. The real European tragedy was not that millions of young men were inconvenienced but that among the killed, inevitably, a few of the great minds of the rising generation were included. And the personal sting for the survivors was not the war-time shock to the nerves, but the fact that in Germany all classes and in England most classes came back to a state of economic upheaval and social uprooting. The redistribution of wealth, its total disappearance from some hands and its ungainly and evil

accumulation in others, engendered feelings of natural and sometimes even praiseworthy bitterness. Above all, the mere struggle in these two countries, united by the misfortunes of a decade of peace, to get and keep employment, a struggle obviously far harder for the young returned soldier than for anyone else, has made many men bitter and has coloured all their reflections on the origins and causes of the war. But to heighten this colouring with every gift of style and descriptive power, to apply it to a restricted canvas, out of focus and out of background, and to call the result 'the actuality of war', that is not only to sin against every canon of history but against every canon of art.

For many survivors in certain countries, and for the countless dead in all, the war entailed a sacrifice which in terms of this world's profit and loss account—pretty sorry terms in any event—is absolute, but that cannot effect the justice or the injustice of the cause on behalf of which this sacrifice was incurred. Neither can it effect an equally relevant, and in this case undisputed, fact that the war, whether just or unjust (and on no conceivable reasoning can the war have been 'unjust' for all parties) was not deemed unjust by any majority, or even by any considerable minority, in any of the countries involved, the succession states of Austria alone excepted. The suggestion, constantly recurring in all these books, that the doomed men were or became convinced of the futility of an adventure which in hard fact was not futile at all, and of the injustice of a cause which obviously could not have been unjust for all sides, is a false suggestion. It is an attempt to sentimentalise, and so to popularise, a tragedy from which, in the interest of propaganda, or more frequently, out of mere egocentricity, the legitimately tragic elements have been flagrantly excluded. And excluded in defiance of an overwhelming array of facts.

Was the ordinary soldier—English, French or German—so ignorant of war and its meaning that what he

felt to be not merely just but overwhelmingly just in 1914 he saw at once to be unjust and futile as soon as he came under fire? The mere facts give the lie. As far as England was concerned the war was fought almost wholly by volunteers. Not only that, but anyone who knows anything about the war knows that it was fought (in the actual physical sense) by only a proportion of the whole body of volunteers, that out of ten thousand men passing through an infantry battalion during its active service not more than 1,000, and those again and again, bore the real burden. It is simply untrue of English, Scottish, Canadian, Australian or South African troops, to suggest that they were lambs, let alone deluded lambs, led to the slaughter. It was a commonplace, for instance, that sickness increased by 200 per cent. *out of the line* and vanished on receipt of orders to go *into the line*. There was a percentage, but certainly less than one per cent. of officers and men, who went sick in the line and recovered out of it. These men were negligible exceptions and they never stayed long. Was it different in other armies? It is hardly likely. Seventy miles of the French front were held by men over forty-five, who withstood the unwelcome discipline and the exposure for four years. The Czechs, who deserted in thousands to the Russians, fought an epic and wholly unnecessary campaign across Russia out of mere enthusiasm after the war was over. The Serbians and the Roumanians with every practical call to surrender and every mundane justification, saw their country laid waste in preference. As for the Germans, the tenacity of their resistance and the strength of *morale* which enabled them to initiate the strategy of infiltration, (which involves fighting in isolated groups usually without officers) in the fourth year of a stupendous struggle against odds, is the most amazing military feature of this or any war. Such feats, surpassing in sheer courage anything in ancient history, are simply not consistent with the psychological reconstructions of our sensitive novelists. Not only was

the war neither futile nor avoidable, but it was not believed to be either by the men who fought. That element at any rate in the story as presented to-day, is not only false, but ridiculously and obviously false.

But in any case, someone will say, the incidents of the individual rebellion or collapse, as they are given, are true. Let us see.

Let us take, for instance, in some detail, for the subject can be accurately defined, the question of cowardice. In the first place, how many officers and men were shot for cowardice during the war? No one knows, but we do know that fewer than ten officers and far fewer than the proportionate number of men were so dealt with in the British Army. We have two English novels about these, two out of the dozen which count about a handful of men among six millions. And how many of these men were educated men with the sensibilities of their kind? Certainly not more than a dozen, and probably much less. And how many of them, like Mr. Herbert's hero, were lion-hearted men of fine fighting records? Certainly none.

And how many men were wrongly convicted and actually executed for a crime never committed? Here we are getting on to the German side and must spcak with less assurance. But we gravely doubt if there were a dozen. Yet one of the six most important German war books is on this strange and ironic theme. And the author makes the amazing, almost incredible, assertion, that the narrative of this one instance (he does not even suggest, as I have done, that there may have been others) helped 'to open the eyes of mankind, which did not know what war really meant.' It would be more sensible—and yet how infinitely discreditable—for a Jew to say that until they had read the report of the Oscar Slater case mankind did not know what Gentile justice was really like. And there is an American book—*The Enormous Room*—on a kindred subject (an American wrongly arrested by the French as a spy and a defeatist), written with much the same idea.

Again, let us take the more ordinary forms of cowardice, the mental collapse, the physical revolt against danger. In *The Secret Battle*, in *Rough Justice*, in *All Quiet*, *The Enormous Room*, and in Bebel's *Red Cavalry*, the coward, sometimes apparently the born coward, but more often the ordinary decent citizen turned into a coward by the horror of war, is always in the front of the picture. And when the ordinary decent man is not turned into a snivelling cur he is turned into a coarse and brutal animal. But is it true?

There is no mystery about it. Exposure to danger, to climatic rigours and lack of food will, if unduly prolonged beyond a certain limit, affect men's nerves. But not more in time of war than anywhere else. The odd, the incredible thing is that in war the effect is so much less. A man cannot hold a brick in his outstretched hand for half an hour. An engine-driver cannot drive an express train for twenty-four hours. A surgeon cannot operate under the most ideal conditions for forty-eight hours on end. A financier cannot work in a luxurious office for twelve hours a day for two years, without being in danger of going temporarily or permanently insane. But the ordinary man can endure the utmost extremity of danger, in conditions foul beyond belief, even for several days at a stretch, not surviving in spite of war *but precisely because it is war*. And he can—tens of thousands of him can—endure almost indefinitely, the mixed assortment of hazard, danger, discomfort and boredom, which make up a campaign. It is, of course, the boredom which saves him. But just as Socialists leave the word 'loss' out of their vocabulary (Sir Ernest Benn assures me that it is actually missing from the main economic treatises of Mr. Sidney Webb), so the months of inactivity and wandering up and down which make up nine-tenths of the life of an infantry soldier are missing from all really 'frank' and 'outspoken' war books.

But what of the exceptions to the general rule of stoical

endurance? The incredible fact is that, speaking by no means casually, but with an almost mathematical accuracy, there are none worth bothering about. Personally, out of many thousands I have only seen two men who had definitely lost all control of their nerves. I exclude, of course, men genuinely shell shocked or weak through loss of blood or sickness. But even here the miracle is the stoicism and endurance of such men. The exceptions are few.

But there is an even worse untruth behind these books in their attitude to this particular question than what may be called the arithmetical error, though, God knows, this is staggering enough. For it is not the ordinary man, still less the brave man, still less, in Mr. Herbert's unfortunate phrase, 'the bravest man I knew' who is shot at dawn. And no one knows it better than Mr. Herbert, who, if bravery were any qualification, would have been shot the first dawn he spent at the front.

So lacking in serious observation and knowledge even of the rather sordid subject of cowardice under fire are most of these writers that they do not appear to know the form that nervous exhaustion takes. It takes the form, not in nine cases out of ten, but in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand, of 'going sick'. It is a malady of the body, not of the mind or the soul. It is a defect, ultimately of the will, very occasionally this side, but almost always the other side of a moral default. It is a phenomenon as hard to classify as the slowness of a slow worker—just a trifle less energy, just a trifle less sincerity of application, concealing itself beneath a genuine physical weakness, but perhaps ever so slightly and quite sub-consciously encouraging it. That is the harshest judgment one can pass in either case.

It is important to distinguish the type that 'goes sick' from the malingerer. Neither the malingerer, the deserter, nor the self-maimer—another stock character of these books, arithmetically more justifiable but wholly mis-

understood—are cowards at all. They are the police court cases of civil life, or, to be accurate, they are that tiny proportion of the police court cases of civil life, who do not find in war the stimulus to effort and decent living which they lacked in peace. Add to them, in the category of malingerers, a handful of hypochondriacs, a few defeatists, and one or two genial cynics whose creed it is that no sensible man who can get away from the front stays there, and you have classified pretty exhaustively the types who find the casualty clearing stations a useful exit from their responsibilities as citizens.

Now let us consider for a moment another aspect of the individual surrender, the failure of the patriotic inspiration. Two of the most remarkable of these books, both by American writers, *The Enormous Room*, and *A Farewell to Arms*, use this as their central *motif*, and in Mr. Graves's wholly different and very gallant *Goodbye to all That*, the issue is raised equally clearly, although on entirely honourable political grounds. The American books both assume as axiomatic that the patriot is an ass, and as a fact, though not perhaps (I am not sure about *The Enormous Room*) as a necessary fact, that the patriot is a cad. Mr. Graves is too clever and too generous to be under these illusions, but he is definitely of the opinion that the patriot was guilty of a fundamental error of judgment.

No critic has a right to object to any expression of opinion by an author. It is sound criticism, however, to object to an assumption of this kind without any evidence being given in support of it. Majorities are not always right, but it is a reasonable rule than when an overwhelming concensus of opinion exists, a very powerful body of evidence is neccssary to upset the presumption that the general consensus is right.

What irritates one even more is to find able writers like Mr. Hemingway and Mr. Cummings apparently taken by surprise by elementary facts of life which to any

doctor or any lawyer are the very A.B.C. of his profession. To find dishonest patriots and charming *déracinés* is not to prove that patriotism is a fraud, or even to make it probable. No one with ten minutes experience of life outside a Bloomsbury studio would expect to find anything else. Some of the most charming people I know are liars; others never pay their bills, and others are unfaithful to their wives or husbands. Some of the most odious people in England are scrupulously honest, truthful and chaste. But it is asking me to resume the mentality of the nursery to adduce these silly truisms in condemnation of the elementary virtues without which human society would fall to pieces. It is precisely so with patriotism. Personally I have found that in an unusually high proportion of cases the anti-patriot is also immoral, untruthful and selfish, but this may be merely my misfortune. Patriotism is a question to be discussed without these refinements and no one has ever made a water-tight case against it. Christ himself, the least conventional and the most independent minded thinker—to treat Christ without blasphemous intention as a purely secular figure —enjoined love of our neighbours and obedience to Caesar. The relevance of the Caesar is obvious. As to the neighbours, I mistrust the type who passes the wounded man by, because of his conviction that there is a more desperately wounded man somewhere else needing his attention.

Any fool and any knave can attack patriotism. But it takes something exceptional among fools and something utterly contemptible among knaves to argue that the individual in a world at war has no obligations at all. It is the quintessence of arrogance for a man to set himself up in judgment against his country and to turn against it. But the position is arguable. What can never be defensible is for a man to condemn the whole world on the strength of his own sloppy philosophy and his own loose morals. These heroes of the *coulisses*, bribing their dirty

way with stolen money across the frontiers, are less than men and cannot be taken as anything else. The precise thing that these people lack is that simplicity of a child which the writer of *The Enormous Room* tries so gallantly to impute to them. The gaoler who gave a healthy kick to his prisoners was, by that test at least, decidedly nearer the kingdom of heaven.

As to Mr. Hemingway's hero, it is impossible to write of him with reasonable restraint. A man who breaks his engagements, deserts at the height of the battle, and aids and abets the desertion with him of a nurse whom he has seduced, would on any reading not be a man I should care to meet except in circumstances which allowed me to say what I thought about him. When we add that this unspeakable cad is not a combatant officer but an ambulance officer whose sole duty is to relieve suffering there is no more to say. The picture of such a man drawn by an artist like Mr. Hemingway might have been a powerful if cruel performance. To write his story without conveying or even hinting at any trace of weakness in his character, or any trace of wrong thinking in his philosophy, is, however, to write a lie, to sin against the Holy Ghost, and between those who cannot realise it and those who cannot do anything else there is a gulf not to be bridged. I must leave it there.

The case of Mr. Graves is, of course, wholly different. He raises one specific issue. Could not the war have been honourably ended earlier? Was it not prolonged out of civilian indifference and professional obstinacy and popular greed and passion? He assumes the affirmative answer though without denying for a moment that the answer seemed to almost everyone else to be different. Further, he has no illusions about the duty of the individual. In other words Mr. Graves is rational and honourable. My only quarrel with him is that he assumes the answer without adducing any evidence and helps—and by the candour and nobility of his book, helps a great

deal—to create and sustain the legend of the futility of the war, which is, as I have said, the underlying conception of almost all these books, and, incidentally, the lamentable cause of their popularity.

Take next the routine of war, which worries even the patient Mottram and drives most of our authors to sullen anger. What of the indifference of the man behind the line, the petty tyranny, the unjust promotions, the cynical judgments. It might have occurred to our eminently literary novelists that these deplorable characteristics of human nature had been observed by Shakespeare a good many years ago:—

> ' . . . the whips and scorns of time,
> Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
> The pangs of despised love, the law's delays,
> The insolence of office and the spurns
> That patient merit of the unworthy takes.'

Into how many superflously irritated pages, into how many million words, have these four and a half lines of transient pessimism been lamentably expanded?

Of course, human nature showed itself in war as in peace. We have all encountered sickeningly complacent generals, insolent staff officers, and the silly pinpricks of nobodies armed with a little brief authority. But for one ordinary decent citizen in whom the war developed these unamiable characteristics, is it not a fair guess to say that there were a score of indolent and callously indifferent idlers whom the war turned into men? As for the leopard who failed to change his spots, why blame the war?

The larger issue, man and the war machine, is not less capable of analysis, but we find no attempt to do so in the modern literature of war. As a matter of fact, and so far we are discussing facts, the 'tragedy' of the man of peace engulfed in the horrors of war, of the man of goodwill forced into the hateful task of slaughter, is just as exceptional as the tragedy of the brave man turned coward or

the innocent man found guilty, or the simple citizen exploited by and sacrificed to the gods of authority. A vast minority, possibly even a majority, of the soldiers of all nations were inured by the hard routine of life to discipline and to danger, to enforced risk and to constant peril, faced for no exalted motive. To some indeed, the war brought not an unlooked-for horror breaking in on a sweet suburban domesticity, but an actual increase of leisure, a freedom from discipline, and no sensible increase in danger or hazard. *Except in times of crisis.* To all, it brought the consciousness of a supreme disinterestedness which, on any reasoning of events, made the sacrifices and the dangers more honourable, and therefore more bearable. *Except*, again, *in times of crisis.* A word of these rare, critical, and often disastrous hours later on. For the rest, the risks, dangers and hardships are different in frequency (though this too is exaggerated) but not in kind from those which inevitably assail the majority of men who live on the edge of danger, of sailors, pioneers, explorers, miners, railwaymen, and all workers in dangerous trades. What is forgotten is that every trade breeds an insensibility to atmosphere which is incomprehensible to outsiders. War is the same. How many holders of the Victoria Cross would undertake, except at the call of duty, the work of the housebreaker, the sport of the racing motorist, the overwhelming responsibility with which every movement of the surgeon's hand and eye are charged? Except again, in moments of crisis, of supreme and unforgettable horror, the same is true of the dangers of war. Only to the suburban of soul, to the fundamentally *un*imaginative and *in*sensitive, not to the sensitive and the imaginative, is the *daily business* of war charged with fear and horror.

Since, on analysis, the question of statistical falsity assumes importance, it is necessary to examine it. The best instance, because the most favourable to the credit of present day war literature, is that fine play, *Journey's*

End. Here we have no defeatism, no false rationalisation of post-war facts or fallacies, nothing is set down in anger or malice. The only falsity is statistical. The scene lives and moves us. It is true in every sense except the fundamental one. The same must have happened in every infantry battalion in the great war sometime and somewhere. As literature it has its justification. But a dramatist of genius, as Mr. Sherriff is, could dramatise with equal poignancy the Black Hole of Calcutta or the scene at the coal face of a doomed colliery, and give us the ardours, the exaltations and fears of men in the face of death. But if Mr. Leo Maxse seized on the one play as 'the truth about India', and Mr. Cook on the other as 'the truth about the mines', every thinking man would inevitably turn from praise to blame.

War accelerates the pulse of life. It produces changes, social, economic and political, within periods impossibly short; changes which it would take generations of peace to produce. And, as with the whole organism under stress of war, so with the cells that make it up. The expectation of life is shortened for all. The experience of years is crowded into days, and hours take the toll of years. This acceleration extends to the death rate, *but it is an acceleration only*. What is forgotten is that war is not a sequence of battles, that, in the aggregate, countless hundreds of thousands of the soldiers of all the armies never experienced more than the slightest risk, and that even an infantryman of the old army, never sick, never on leave, never transferred to other duties and never absent from an engagement, could not have seen, during the whole duration of the war, more than 1,000 hours of actively dangerous fighting.

I have written the last paragraphs not without some misgiving. It is inevitable that there will be those who feel that it is an attempt to minimise the sufferings of the war which reflects a lack of sympathy, imagination or even decency, in the face of a record of unexampled

tragedy and horror. It is for those who feel like this to explain their horrible indifference to the injustices of the present times. Nothing is easier than sympathy about the past; nothing harder than the disturbance of an easy and comfortable life which is the price of any sincere and burning indignation about the present. For my part I can recall none of the months, and there were a good many, of my active service, without recalling poignant and bitter memories. But I can remember so much else besides. Am I alone in this? So far from it that I state positively and without fear of sober contradiction that no honest, dispassionate, and *really* frank retrospect of war, no crystallisation in words of its full store of memories and ultimate meaning by decently humble and conscientious men, will reflect anything but a mixture of good and bad, intensified above the *tempo* of peace but in proportions fundamentally the same.

But surely, it will be said, the admitted exceptions, the moments, hours, or even days of crisis, are the only things that mattered. Yet the validity of this argument can be challenged from half a dozen angles and can be sustained from none. Sarpedon gives us one answer. His words to Glaucus come unchallenged by men of honour across two thousand years of suffering. Brave men face the crisis before it comes and accept it. The miner is trapped in the burning pit; his sons follow his coffin to the grave and go back to the mine; or he is rescued himself and himself returns. The shipwrecked sailor does not hurry to Tooting and security; the railwaymen, of whose lives modern commerce and modern luxury take a ceaseless toll, do not flinch from his always dangerous task. Nor does society even allow them an obituary notice. The casualties to passengers are all that are reported. The same is the fundamental truth about the modern literature of the war. It, too, is concerned only with the casualties to passengers. The majority, who never flinched, are forgotten.

Of course, the deception practised is largely unconscious, but for all that it is successful only because a new generation seeks the truth that it wishes to find. The moments of crisis came, usually foreknown and almost always endured, but still bringing brave men to the edge of resistance and sometimes beyond. Every shipwreck, every railway accident and every civil disaster reveals the same high average of deathless courage, the same incredibly small percentage of craven fear and hysterical egotism. The statistical falsity of these modern war books is staggering. The stories told are, of course, true to the belief of the writers. They find an exact parallel in the stories which wounded men bring down from a battlefield, and they tell tales which are as reliable as the stories of such men always are. But the time for listening to them is gone. We have the records of whole men to read from. Are there no whole men in this generation to understand them?

This question of statistical falsity is, in one sense, not fundamental. A futile war is not worth the sacrifice of a single life, and murder cannot be defended on the ground that after all, its victims were very few. The blood of one man uselessly slain demands vengeance as full and as merciless—and will in God's time receive it—as the blood of thousands. But this elementary point, so obvious to every Christian, so obvious indeed, to anyone of any creed who has any respect for morality or even, what is so much less important, for human life, is lost on the authors of these books, and that point *is* fundamental. No doubt the falsification of perspective is not deliberate but unconscious, but that only makes it all the more certain that it is prompted, not by moral indignation, which needs no stimulus from lies, but either by an injured self-esteem protesting against the shock to aesthetic and physical susceptibilities, or by the mere desire to plead specially for a class or a cause at any cost. Had the shock to their susceptibilities, so widely felt to-day

by writers and readers of war books, the slightest moral basis, the disgusting slaughter on our roads—in Great Britain alone nearly 190,000 people were killed or wounded in motor-car accidents in 1928—would provoke an outcry which would deafen Heaven. But with one honourable exception—Lord Cecil—not a voice has been raised. These things are not seen, and the physical sensibilities of men of the literary type are not therefore outraged.

That this is no false analogy is shown, I venture to say conclusively, by the ceaseless chatter about peace which has gone on to the accompaniment of uninterrupted war ever since 1918. So far from there being, or having been, any real increase in human sympathy, by which I mean a practical measure of revolt against the sufferings of other people *showing itself in a determination to make sacrifices in order to end or lessen such sufferings*, the post-war world has shown a callous and cynical indifference. Against the continuation of the German blockade after the Armistice, a cruel and senseless act of civilian politicians, hardly a voice was raised in the country, and not one of the 'frank and fearless' exposures of the brutality of soldiers makes a reference to it. The brutalities of the Sinn Feiners and the Black-and-Tans in Ireland raised a purely partisan outcry. But other things are far more significant. The great war on the Indian Frontier excited so little interest among peace-loving internationalists that hardly anyone knows when or where it took place. The war in Morocco excited so little attention that only one or two newspapers bothered even to send a special correspondent. The Russian civil war, the Bolshevist massacres and the Russian invasion of Poland aroused so little interest among pacifists that it is unsafe to-day even to refer to them. For political reasons, left wing politicians and writers prefer to imagine that they never took place, though they are not yet willing to forget the massacre of Saint Bartholomew when, in an age when men lived and expected to live by

their swords, a few score of men of military age were put to death. Yet the murder of Bishops, priests, officers, members of the learned professions and peasants in post-war Russia, not by hundreds or thousands, but quite literally by tens of thousands, is an historical fact definitely established.

I do not write this in any controversial spirit. Atrocious things have been done in the name of great institutions. Let us assume that the Communist State is in that category. What is significant to the issue that we are discussing is that the very people who are writing, reading and praising these war books, who talk so sanctimoniously of the horror of suffering and of their passionate sympathy for the oppressed, were not only not ready to lift a finger to prevent the Russian anarchy —for which they may perhaps be excused—but are occupied in pretending quite conscientiously that it never took place. It never did, as far as they were concerned. It was a long way off, and they were perfectly safe. All this is very human and intelligible, but it throws a very different light on the kind of idealism which actuates the literature we are discussing.

Precisely in the same way, these people who are so 'vigorously' turning against the idea of war, are occupied to-day in pretending that the civil wars which are ruining China are mere newspaper talk, and that what is really in progress is an enlightened movement towards Parliamentary government. Similarly, we shall hear, no doubt, that the Russian attacks with tanks and gas on two Chinese towns was only a practical gesture of their adherence to the spirit of the Kellogg Pact.

Here again, I wish to raise no political issues. I am content to say without fear of being contradicted that at no time in the history of Western European civilisation since the Thirty Years' War has there been a more complete and callous indifference to the devastation of vast tracts of country by irresponsible warfare. The attitude

of the British, French, German and American public today has less morality in it than ever before. Even when the British Government, greatly daring, summoned up its courage to save at least one Chinese city from anarchy and pillage, there was, with the honourable exception of a few front bench Labour politicians, nothing but criticism, or, at the very best, sullen indifference from the left-wing writers and talkers. Mr. Robert Graves reports Mr. Lytton Strachey as saying to the Tribunal which heard his plea for exemption as a conscientious objector during the war, that he did not object to war, but only 'to this war'. Can it be disputed in the face of these facts that this is the real attitude if not of all these writers, yet certainly of the public which is getting hysterical about them and of most of the critics who revel in their 'frankness and fearlessness'? They are not turned or turning against injustice. They are reacting, and certainly very vigorously, to discomfort. Which of these ardent idealists will be found worthy of the proud epitaph of the Roman Pontiff—'I have loved justice and hated iniquity and therefore I die in exile'?

But, it may be argued finally, you are asking too much of these writers and their books. They are not statesmen, humanitarians or religious leaders, but merely authors, and their books do not claim to show the whole war. They only show 'a significant side of it'. To which I reply that half the truth is a lie and that if we deny a representative quality to these books they are left above criticism only in so far as any literature which lacks the representative quality is worth criticising at all. Are these books in reality things remote from the stream of life, mere ornaments on the banks to be passed by with a comment? If these books are only so many studies of non-significant and non-representative incidents in the lives of non-significant individuals, they have, regarded even as studies of death, terror and disaster, no more importance than reporters' tales of a fire or an earthquake.

The facts, however, are to the contrary. These books do, quite deliberately, try to tell us something about war. The aim, where it is not self-confessed, as by Zweig and Remarque, is confessed by the nature of the chosen characters. The whole of these books deal with specifically ordinary people. They do not show the poet, the artist, the statesman or the man of religion sacrificed, yet this is the only legitimate individual tragedy of war just because it is not really an individual but a universal tragedy.

I am driven back therefore to the conviction, borne in on me by the first reading of these books, that they are books about the war and that the critics are right in reviewing them as such, the public right in reading them as such. The only conclusion is that they must be judged as such, and it is as such that they stand condemned.

'The web of history is woven without a void.' You cannot simply assume that an historical event is something that never need have happened. The fact that it happened is against you. You can dream until you are blue in the face of what the world would have been like if the world had been different, but you cannot reconstruct an historical event subject to a basic assumption that human nature was different from what the events which you are reconstructing show it to have been at the time when the events happened.

In the second place, you cannot accept the consequences of an event and condemn the event without regard to the consequences. You cannot accept the League of Nations, the self-determination of nations, the new spirit in international affairs and condemn without qualification the agonies which brought them about. You must face the issue and say either that it was better that these things had never been if it meant so much loss and so much suffering, or that the sacrifice was justified. To say, or to assume, or to suggest, that the results of the war could have been achieved without the cause, is merely to say that human nature might have been different in the past,

without adding that it might have been different either way. It might equally well have been ready to surrender to force, or to pursue aims which rendered the appeal to force unnecessary. But what of it? Neither variety of circumstance was the prevailing kind in July, 1914.

In the third place, the mere quality of the slaughter, the mere intensity of the suffering, is an irrelevancy. If the war had been for all parties an unnecessary war, had it caused but one death, that death would have been murder, and the guilt of it absolute and unexpiable on earth. If the war was just, by which I mean avoidable, by at least one party, at the sacrifice only of honourable principles honourably held for conscience sake, then the most disastrous losses were not too high, unless we hold that no principle is worth the sacrifice of any life, and that in circumstances which demand either heavy sacrifice of life or loss of principle, the principle must go.

To put it another way, if there were indeed some other way open to the men of 1914, it was not more open because the war losses were heavy than it would have been had they been light.

Finally, we come to the gravest problem, grave because it concerns not the past which is unalterable nor the future which is uncertain, but the present, on which, as always, is laid the task of gathering the harvest and sowing the seed.

The underlying *motif* of these books, the picture painted of the four years conflict as an unbroken sequence of sanguinary, futile and purposeless horrors, debasing its participants, holds the seeds of a false doctrine which, once learnt, will be unlearnt only at a tragic cost. That doctrine is the inherent perfectability of man. We are given by inference a picture of society as in a state of constant and automatic progress, senselessly checked in its course by the wicked incursion on to the political stage of soldiers and militarist politicians. Would to God that it were so.

Actually, the state of the world to-day shows three good things; the extension of responsible government to Germany and the succession states, the westernization of Turkey, and the establishment of the League of Nations as an integral part of the machinery of international politics. The value of all these things can easily be exaggerated; optimism is easy to the half educated. But that, on balance, they are sound and healthy developments will be denied by few.

Let us look now at the other side. The really significant thing in the world to-day is not the League of Nations, useful and good though it is, but the slow breakdown over almost a third of Europe and over almost half Asia of the restraints of civilisation, the threat to order and solidarity which hangs over India and Egypt, and the failure, so far almost absolute, of western standards of justice and religious liberty to be accepted over comparatively wide stretches of Central and South America. Western civilisation is a dangerous term. How easy to sneer at its limitations, its hypocrisies. They exist —never more marked than in this enlightened age so busy in teaching that it has not time to learn. But with all its grotesque and disgusting deficiencies, there is in it something which has to be cherished if culture is not to perish, and which has to be defended if culture is not to be submerged. This issue to-day is in the balance, and the writers of these books are fighting on the wrong side.

They are teaching the philosophy of ease in place of the philosophy of effort. They are ignoring the problem of good and evil. They are proclaiming to the world to-day, which has reasons for hope only because of what was won in the struggle of 1914-18, that the evils of to-day are due to that struggle. Christian charity should urge me to say that the stolid and unintelligent refusal of the *intelligentsia* to be moved to indignation, or even to the faintest gesture of disapproval, by the calculated infliction of suffering and misery on hundreds of millions

in Russia, China, Mexico and Afghanistan is the result merely of a defective vision. Perhaps it is. But when we see in these books a resolute and deliberate concealment of the results of the war as they have affected western civilisation for good, it is impossible to avoid the suspicion that the simultaneous refusal of the progressives to understand the disastrous decay of western civilisation outside Europe is not accidental. None of the facts of the world-situation to-day fit in with the theory which regards the late war as a wanton interruption of an automatic progress. Nor do any other facts known to scholars. You cannot ignore the problem of good and evil without flying in the face of every attested fact in the sombre record of human experience.

Finally, what of the future? If certain philosophies had not been held, if certain men had been more virtuous, and certain others more far-sighted, if, in other words, half a hundred things in the life of Europe over half a century, and certain traits in the nature of man developed by the conflicts, arguments and pressure of natural circumstances over four hundred years, had been different, the war of 1914 could and would have been avoided. That is childishly obvious but, like many childish things, extremely hard for grown men to see. It is because these books do not, in fact, see it, that they are doing a profound and probably a lasting disservice. The object, conscious or unconscious, of all these books is to simplify and sentimentalise the problem of war and peace until the problem disappears in a silly gesture of complacent moral superiority, and the four years of war are shown idiotically as four years of disastrous, sanguinary and futile battles in which everything was lost and nothing gained, a struggle begun for no purpose and continued for no reason. To present this view of war in pages of vivid and poignant prose is to create in the minds of the public a love of peace foolishly based on a barren fear of useless suffering. If the growing generation get this picture of

war into their heads, it will go hardly with them indeed.[1]

If they conceive the generation of 1914 as a generation of callous and futile fools playing with fire, and of war as a mere instrument of policy carelessly applied and found, to the chagrin of the combatants, to be a very dangerous instrument, they will never learn the real lesson of the disaster. Confident that they and their contemporaries in other lands have, thanks to their eloquence and their awakened consciences, now finally realised that men are killed and bodies maimed in war, they will go ahead, as they are doing to-day, with their policies of reconstruc-

[1] Since writing this, I am proud to find that great statesman and architect of peace—General Smuts—making this point and going so far as to say that the problem of securing justice in an imperfect world is the most far-reaching with which lovers of peace are faced, if those lovers of peace are lovers of justice also. 'There is no doubt', he says, 'that war has in the past sometimes served as a solvent for intolerable situations, it has sometimes destroyed the bulwarks of ancient wrong and opened the way to necessary reforms and readjustments. If war in future is to be rendered impossible, we must see to it that its function, so far as it has been beneficent in the past, be discharged by some other means. Peace must be dynamic; it must keep the door open to reform and to freedom and must not become an incubus on human progress. The springs of reform, of progress and of freedom, must not be frozen under a deadly peace. Peace must be the handmaiden of justice in the new world towards which mankind is marching. This position was clearly foreseen by the framers of the Covenant, and article 19 calls for means by which obsolete and intolerable situations can be abolished. The creation of such machinery and its careful working under proper safeguards, will be one of the greatest and most difficult tasks of the League. The time is rapidly approaching when this task will have to be faced. Otherwise all our machinery of peace, our World Court, our arbitration tribunals, and other legal agencies will merely serve to entrench the status quo and render the danger of future explosions all the greater'.—*The Times*, November 15th, 1929.

765298

tion, evolution and what-not, of building a new world without regard to the preferences of the inhabitants of the world as it is—the error of every militarist from the days of Alexander downwards—and they will find themselves faced, as we were faced in 1914, with what General Smuts calls 'intolerable situations' in consequence of their policies. Only if the generation now growing up in Europe and America can all, and all at once, be taught to realise that the war of 1914 was, in 1914, inevitable, will they learn not to ride their silly hobby horses so that another war will be equally inevitable. For no races of men which hold the Christian faith and are born of woman will ever grow up in the belief that principles which they have come to hold for conscience sake are to be abandoned for safety's sake. The appeal to sentiment will inevitably fail.

If there were no other way, I should not regret that failure. If the day came when the fear of suffering and nothing else turned nations from their chosen path, Western civilisation would give way to a nobler one. But every lover of peace is entitled to regret that the appeal to sentiment should be made just at the time when the urgent task is to think coolly and clearly about the realities of war, which have their roots in history. And still more are we entitled to regret that by so much painful and foolish exaggeration of the horrors of war, the way should have been smoothed, and for no exalted motive, for the reaction to the equally senseless glorification of war as an ardent adventure. Yet as surely as one lie breeds another, this reaction will be the result of these books.

It is time we got back to the truth—unromantic, unchivalrous, unadventurous, unadorned by the marvellous, the epic or the obscene, simply WAR.

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